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P A P E R

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# Whither Strategic Communication?

A Survey of Current Proposals  
and Recommendations

Christopher Paul

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## Preface

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Strategic communication and public diplomacy have been the targets of scathing criticism and proposals for overhaul since shortly after September 11, 2001. Proposals and recommendations abound, but many reform efforts have stumbled or have been plagued by false starts. With the need for reform persisting and interest in this area continuing to grow, the RAND Corporation elected to conduct a survey of existing reform and improvement proposals. The research was completed in October and November 2008. This occasional paper results from the RAND Corporation's continuing program of self-initiated research. Support for such research is provided, in part, by donors and by the independent research and development provisions of RAND's contracts for the operation of its U.S. Department of Defense federally funded research and development centers.

This research was conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the defense agencies, the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Intelligence Community, allied foreign governments, and foundations.

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Questions or comments about the content of this paper are welcome and can be directed to the author, Christopher Paul, by email at [Christopher\\_Paul@rand.org](mailto:Christopher_Paul@rand.org) or by phone at 412-683-2300, extension 4609.



## Summary

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Countless studies, articles, and opinion pieces have announced that U.S. strategic communication and public diplomacy are in crisis and are inadequate to meet current demand. There is consensus that such capabilities are critical and that they need to be improved. This paper reviews contemporary thinking regarding the advancement of U.S. strategic communication, cataloging recent recommendations and identifying common themes and the frequency with which they are endorsed. Based on the recommendations put forth by the 36 selected documents and articulated in more than a dozen interviews with stakeholders and subject-matter experts, findings indicate that four core themes capture consensus recommendations: a call for “leadership,” demand for increased resources for strategic communication and public diplomacy, a call for a clear definition of an overall strategy, and the need for better coordination and organizational changes or additions. This paper also discusses specific recommendations for strategy elements or resource targets that made frequent appearances in the literature and during interviews.





## Acknowledgments

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I owe my friend and colleague Matt Armstrong a considerable debt of gratitude for his support of this effort. Matt helped arrange and conduct many of the interviews used in this research. Thanks also go to all who took time to give us interviews. I cannot thank everyone by name due to anonymity requests by some, but know that I value and appreciate all of your contributions. I am indebted to K. Jack Riley, Michael Lostumbo, and James Dobbins at RAND for their encouragement and support. I also thank RAND colleague Eric Larson and Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication chair Vince Vitto for their thoughtful and constructive reviews of an earlier draft. My administrative assistant, Maria Falvo, has once again earned my heartfelt gratitude for her work organizing my notes and formatting this paper and the copious citations herein. Editor Lauren Skrabala was instrumental in getting this paper into the fine final form you see before you. Errors and omissions remain my responsibility alone.



## Abbreviations

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BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOS	U.S. Department of State
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. General Accounting Office prior to July 7, 2004)
NSC	National Security Council
NSRD	RAND National Security Research Division
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
USAPD	U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy
USIA	U.S. Information Agency



# Whither Strategic Communication? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations

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In our entire history as a nation, world opinion has never been as hostile toward the United States as it is today.

—Zbigniew Brzezinski, 2004<sup>1</sup>

Countless studies, articles, and opinion pieces have announced that U.S. strategic communication and public diplomacy are in crisis and inadequate to meet current demand. There is consensus that such capabilities are critical and that they need to be improved. An equally large number of reports and opinions offer recommendations: some general, some specific; some vague, some unambiguous; some ambitious, some contradictory. This paper reviews contemporary thinking regarding the advancement of U.S. strategic communication, cataloging recent recommendations and identifying common themes and the frequency with which they are endorsed. General challenges facing reform efforts and criticisms of specific recommendations appear throughout.

This research is based on a substantial literature review supported by interviews with subject-matter experts who also provided or recommended additional documents. Identified recommendations have been sorted into one of 22 inductively determined categories. The analysis groups the identified categories into core themes and presents the frequency with which the recommendations appear. This survey includes recommendations from 36 documents (listed in Appendix A). While many more documents were considered in the course of this research, those selected met several criteria: All are unclassified and releasable,<sup>2</sup> relatively recent, and contain cogent, discernable recommendations regarding U.S. government strategic communication or public diplomacy. There are likely relevant reports that have been omitted (one interview respondent joked that a State Department colleague had in his office a stack of printed reports on public diplomacy so large that it required an improvised wooden scaffold to remain standing in a single stack), but the included documents capture the major themes and core recommendations currently being discussed in this community.

This research also involved more than a dozen semistructured interviews with stakeholders in the U.S. Department of State (DOS), the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), as well as with academics and industry experts involved in the field or who participated in drafting one or more of the selected reports. The interview protocol that guided the interviews is included in Appendix B. During these inter-

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<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Hostility to America Has Never Been So Great," *New Perspective Quarterly*, Summer 2004.

<sup>2</sup> This effort discovered several proprietary or for official use only (but unclassified) reports in the area of strategic communication and public diplomacy; these are not included in the final assessment.

views, respondents were asked to review and comment on the growing inventory list and note omissions.

## Definitions

While there is consensus on both the criticality of and the need for improved strategic communication and public diplomacy, there is a lack of consensus on definitions and what should be included under the auspices of the terms. The *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines *strategic communication* quite broadly as

[f]ocused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.<sup>3</sup>

Some experts use *strategic communication* and *public diplomacy* as synonyms,<sup>4</sup> while some subordinate *strategic communication* to *public diplomacy*<sup>5</sup> and others vice versa.<sup>6</sup> Although less common, some describe *public diplomacy* quite narrowly as “exchanges, international information programs, and field operations carried out by the Department of State.”<sup>7</sup> Others pluralize *strategic communications* (though rarely in DoD), and still others refer to *perception management*<sup>8</sup> or something else entirely. *Strategic communication* is more commonly the preferred term of art in the DoD context, and *public diplomacy* is more common in and around DOS.

Although, in some sense, it makes little difference how exactly we define *strategic communication* and *public diplomacy* (and perhaps it is fine if, like pornography, we “know it when we see it”), this research embraces the term *strategic communication* and advocates defining it as broadly and inclusively as possible. The author has argued elsewhere for broad conceptions of communication (to include the message content of policies and actions) and for the coordination of communications of all kinds with other activities in the pursuit of strategic or operational goals.<sup>9</sup> This is not a unique view: A 2008 article in *IOSphere* notes the importance of

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, April 12, 2001 (as amended through March 4, 2008), p. 522.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Professor Bruce Gregory, director, Public Diplomacy Institute, George Washington University, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., September 24, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, John Robert Kelley, “Between ‘Take-Offs’ and ‘Crash Landings’: Situational Aspects of Public Diplomacy,” in Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Philip M. Taylor, “Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication,” in Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> American Academy of Diplomacy and Stimson Center, *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness*, October 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Matteo G. “Mooch” Martemucci, “A Critical Analysis of the US Government’s Current Perception Management Efforts,” *IOSphere*, Winter 2008.

<sup>9</sup> See Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-607-JFCOM, 2007, and

keeping the definition of *strategic communication* connected both to the national-level context and to kinetic activities and what they communicate.<sup>10</sup>

Of greater impact than exactly which activities are included—and whether they are strategic communication, public diplomacy, or both—are debates over *approaches* to public diplomacy. Different theories of public diplomacy suggest different (and sometimes conflicting) courses of action. These are not just academic debates, but real, consequential divergences in contemporary communication activities. Which to pursue and in what balance affects the allocation of resources. As one interview respondent noted, “Public diplomacy has been divided over what it is trying to accomplish for a long time.”<sup>11</sup>

The first divergence of approaches is between those who believe that “to know us is to love us”<sup>12</sup> and want to focus public diplomacy on telling the American story and those who hold that demonstrating shared values and respect through policies and the explanations of those policies is more effective.<sup>13</sup> A second pair of competing areas of emphasis is noted in a 2007 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that contrasts changes in the British government’s strategic communication efforts to emphasize building support for *specific policy objectives* with DOS efforts that aim primarily to “help improve the general image of the United States.”<sup>14</sup> A third area of disagreement is over communication models, with one side caricaturized as trying to craft the perfect message in isolation and then broadcast it, with opponents criticizing the one-sided nature of such transmissions and suggesting instead that true communication is based on understanding and “engagement” through successfully built relationships.<sup>15</sup> A fourth area is the disagreement over the use of both “black” and “white” communication—namely, those who want to include propaganda (with all its negative connotations) in strategic communication and those who prefer to influence exclusively through trustworthy and credible communication.<sup>16</sup> Finally, and related to the first and last disagreements presented here, is between those who consider audience-building a success and those

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Christopher Paul, *Information Operations—Doctrine and Practice: A Handbook*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Charles S. Gramaglia, “Strategic Communication: Distortion and White Noise,” *IOSphere*, Winter 2008, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Sherman, director of strategic planning, Broadcasting Board of Governors, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., September 16, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> For an example of the former in action, see Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, June 2007. For a discussion of the tension (with advocacy for the latter position), see Nancy Snow, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy,” in Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, 2009, or Barry Fulton, Bruce Gregory, Donna Marie Oglesby, Walter R. Roberts, and Barry Zorthian, “A Dissent: Transformation Not Restoration,” dissent to the January 2005 Public Diplomacy Council report, *A Call for Action on Public Diplomacy*, undated.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research*, Washington, D.C., GAO-07-904, July 2007, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, R. S. Zaharna, “Mapping Out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives: Information and Relational Communication Frameworks,” in Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, 2009; Steven R. Corman, Angela Trethewey, and Bud Goodall, *A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas: From Simplistic Influence to Pragmatic Complexity*, Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, Report No. 0701, April 3, 2007; and Council on Foreign Relations, *Finding America’s Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating U.S. Public Diplomacy*, New York, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Kelley, 2009.



who would prefer to see actual evidence of influence. (If one believes that “to know us is to love us,” then increased audience *is* success.)<sup>17</sup>

Certainly, being clear about what will be included under the definition of *strategic communication* and what core philosophy or philosophies will underpin U.S. government efforts is something that is called for in the recommendation theme “Define Overall Strategy,” discussed in the next section.

## Common Themes in the Recommendations

This review of recommendations for the improvement of strategic communication and public diplomacy is divided into four common key themes that appear to have the broadest support across the documents reviewed and interviews conducted:

- a call for “leadership”
- demand for increased resources for strategic communication and public diplomacy
- a call for a clear definition of an overall strategy
- the need for better coordination and organizational changes (or additions).

Each of these four themes, along with specific recommendations in the theme area, is discussed in turn. Table 1 presents a summary of recommendations and the documents from which they are derived. The last row of the table sums the frequency with which these recommendations appear. Frequency can be interpreted, in this case, as a rough measure of both importance and agreement across documents.

### Leadership

Nine of the selected documents (and roughly half of the interviews) explicitly call for “leadership” on strategic communication or public diplomacy. *Leadership* is used in this context to denote several different concepts.

Several reports call for direct presidential interest and involvement or direct presidential access for those deputized with responsibility for strategic communication.<sup>18</sup> This type of leadership is necessary, proponents argue, because of the sweeping reforms these reports advocate—reforms that are much more likely with direct presidential attention. Leadership of this kind would include clear evidence that strategic communication is a national priority, which would increase the attention and responsiveness of those involved in planning and execution.<sup>19</sup>

Other invocations of *leadership* refer to a need for authority. Because strategic communication requires coordination across departments and agencies, proponents indicate that inter-agency leadership will need coordinating authority: “These leaders must have authority as well

<sup>17</sup> Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy*, Washington, D.C., October 2003.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Washington, D.C., September 2004, p. 3, and Kristin M. Lord, *Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> An anonymous interview respondent noted that whatever the policy issue, advocates always want someone close to the president for exactly these reasons; there is nothing unique about strategic communication in that regard.

as responsibility—authorities to establish priorities, assign operational responsibilities, transfer funds, and concur in senior personnel appointments.”<sup>20</sup> False starts in organizing for strategic communication have revealed that “a committee of equals without an authoritative director is a recipe for inaction.”<sup>21</sup> One interview respondent suggested that DoD needs an undersecretary counterpart for Jim Glassman at DOS—an undersecretary for strategic communication. Currently, DoD’s strategic communication coordinating structure involves three organizations: the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and the Joint Staff. If any of these organizations attempts to exercise strong leadership, it risks offending the prerogatives of the other two. This respondent suggested that anointing a leader with authority over parts of all three would resolve the problem.<sup>22</sup>

Leadership is also invoked by some sources as a proxy call for good choices, with regard to both organizing for strategic communication and creating policies and statements about those policies. As one interview respondent noted, “Bad policies cannot be well communicated.”<sup>23</sup> The president is the United States’ “communicator-in-chief” and is advised to maintain a personal awareness of global public opinion and how it will affect (and be affected by) policy.<sup>24</sup> Advocates indicate that showing this kind of leadership requires not only mindfulness of the communication implicit in policies and decisions, but also the inclusion of communication specialists at “the take offs, not just the crash landings.”<sup>25</sup> According to one respondent, a key question remains: “Are we thinking about strategic communication when we make policy?”<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein, proponents use a call for leadership as a call for clear direction. One paper laments “the lack of clear, articulate strategy from the national leadership” for strategic communication.<sup>27</sup> Clear direction can include both the prioritization of strategic communication and its inclusion in the foreign policymaking process<sup>28</sup> and direction on strategic goals and communication themes.<sup>29</sup>

### Increased Resources

There is strong consensus that strategic communication and public diplomacy are underresourced. Fully 19 of the documents reviewed recommend resource increases in this area, as did the majority of the interview respondents. Specifically, most of the recommendations concern

<sup>20</sup> Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Washington, D.C., January 2008, p. xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Martemucci, 2008, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ambassador Brian E. Carlson, senior liaison for strategic communication, Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous author interview.

<sup>24</sup> Lord, 2008, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Edward R. Murrow, director of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), quoted in Council on Foreign Relations, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous author interview.

<sup>27</sup> Lindsey J. Borg, *Communicating with Intent: DoD and Strategic Communication*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University, April 2007, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Public Diplomacy Council, *A Call for Action on Public Diplomacy*, January 2005, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Mari K. Eder, “Toward Strategic Communication,” *Military Review*, July–August 2007.

**Table 1**  
**Selected Sources and Corresponding Recommendations, by Document Type**

Document	Leadership	Increase Resources	Define Overall Strategy	Coordinate Better	New Agency	New Independent Supporting Org	Reorganize at DOS	Reorganize at DoD	Presidential Directive/Reorganize at White House	Rebalance Authority Between Agencies	New Coordinators in NSC, OMB, etc.	Revise Smith-Mundt Act	Increase Private-Sector Involvement	Whole-of-Government/Enterprise-Level Approach	Better Use of Research	Greater Focus on Measurement	Increase Technology Use/Experiment with New Technology	Update/Revise Doctrine & Training	Increase Training & Education	Increase Exchanges, Libraries, etc.	Establish a Quadrennial Review	Review International Broadcasting
<b>Reports</b>																						
Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, <i>Changing Minds, Winning Peace</i> , 2003	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X			X		
American Academy of Diplomacy and Stimson Center, <i>A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future</i> , 2008		X								X							X			X		
Center for Strategic and International Studies, Commission on Smart Power, <i>A Smarter, More Secure America</i> , 2007	X	X		X	X			X	X	X									X		X	
Council on Foreign Relations, <i>Finding America's Voice</i> , 2003		X	X	X	X			X			X	X			X		X			X	X	
Defense Science Board, <i>Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication</i> , 2004	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X										
Defense Science Board, <i>Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication</i> , 2008	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X		X			X		X
Epstein, Susan B., <i>U.S. Public Diplomacy</i> , 2006		X	X		X	X	X		X		X			X		X	X					
Epstein, Susan B., and Lisa Mages, <i>Public Diplomacy</i> , 2005																						
Fulton, Barry, et al., "A Dissent: Transformation Not Restoration," dissent to the January 2005 Public Diplomacy Council report, undated		X															X			X		
Lord, Kristin M., <i>Voices of America</i> , 2008	X	X	X	X		X	X					X	X	X	X		X		X			X
Public Diplomacy Council, <i>A Call for Action on Public Diplomacy</i> , 2005	X	X			X	X			X	X	X	X							X	X		
Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, <i>U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication</i> , 2007		X		X									X	X		X	X			X		
U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, <i>Building America's Public Diplomacy Through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources</i> , 2002		X		X		X		X			X	X										
U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, <i>Getting the People Part Right</i> , 2008		X				X												X	X			
U.S. Department of Defense, <i>Quadrennial Defense Review Report</i> , 2006		X		X										X				X	X			
U.S. Department of Defense, "QDR Execution Roadmap for Strategic Communication," 2006		X		X			X							X				X	X			
U.S. Department of State, <i>2004 Report of the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy</i> , 2004		X		X		X					X	X				X	X			X		
U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project, <i>Changing Course</i> , 2008	X			X							X	X	X					X		X		

Table 1—Continued

Document	Leadership	Increase Resources	Define Overall Strategy	Coordinate Better	New Agency	New Independent Supporting Org	Reorganize at DOS	Reorganize at DoD	Presidential Directive/Reorganize at White House	Rebalance Authority Between Agencies	New Coordinators in NSC, OMB, etc.	Revise Smith-Mundt Act	Increase Private-Sector Involvement	Whole-of-Government/Enterprise-Level Approach	Better Use of Research	Greater Focus on Measurement	Increase Technology Use/Experiment with New Technology	Update/Revise Doctrine & Training	Increase Training & Education	Increase Exchanges, Libraries, etc.	Establish a Quadrennial Review	Review International Broadcasting
GAO reports																						
Various reports, 2003–2007		X	X	X									X		X	X		X	X			
Legislation, proposed legislation, and congressional hearings																						
Bagley, Ambassador Elizabeth, “A Reliance on Smart Power: Reforming the Public Diplomacy Bureaucracy,” testimony, 2008		X		X				X					X							X		
U.S. Senate, Strategic Communications Act of 2008, S.3546, 2008						X				X		X										X
U.S. Senate, Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, S.3001, §1054, 2008, and U.S. House of Representatives, joint explanatory statement, 2008			X	X							X											
Articles, monographs, and white papers																						
Armstrong, Matt, “Persuasive Politics,” <i>Washington Times</i> , 2008												X										
Borg, Lindsey J., <i>Communicating with Intent</i> , 2007.	X		X	X				X			X			X				X	X			
Gregory, Bruce, “Public Diplomacy and National Security: Lessons from the U.S. Experience,” <i>Small Wars Journal</i> , 2008			X			X							X				X					X
Helmus, Todd C., Christopher Paul, Russell W. Glenn, <i>Enlisting Madison Avenue</i> , 2007		X		X				X				X		X				X	X			
Johnson, Stephen, Helle C. Dale, and Patrick Cronin, “Strengthening U.S. Public Diplomacy Requires Organization, Coordination, and Strategy,” 2005		X	X	X		X	X				X	X			X					X		
Korologos, Tom, and Bruce Sherman, “Developing a Center for Global Engagement at RAND,” 2008						X							X		X							
Martemucci, Matteo G. “Mooch,” “A Critical Analysis of the US Government’s Current Perception Management Efforts,” <i>IOSphere</i> , 2008	X			X					X		X											
Warner, Leigh, “Center for Global Engagement: A Proposal for the Creation of a Congressionally-Funded Entity,” 2008						X																
Zwiebel, Michael J., “Why We Need to Reestablish the USIA,” <i>Military Review</i> , 2006					X																	
Total endorsements	9	20	9	19	4	10	10	6	9	5	14	6	13	9	6	5	10	7	9	11	2	4

NOTE: NSC = National Security Council. OMB = Office of Management and Budget.

increases in both personnel and funding for programs and activities. One interview respondent argued the importance of balance between the two: People are needed “out there” to execute the funded programs.<sup>30</sup> Many experts advocate quite substantial funding increases—three- to fivefold in certain areas.<sup>31</sup> Repeating detailed recommendations is beyond the scope of this effort, but some specific target areas for increased resourcing are discussed later, in the section “Recommended Strategy Elements and Resource Targets.”

### **Define Overall Strategy**

Roughly one-third of the reviewed documents and interviews put forth recommendations for a clearly defined overall strategy. Such calls range from the very general (“this country should identify what it stands for and communicate that message clearly”)<sup>32</sup> to the specific. Multiple GAO reports call for strategy statements regarding specific objectives, such as how DOS intends to implement public diplomacy in the Muslim world,<sup>33</sup> how private-sector public-relations techniques will be incorporated into DOS efforts,<sup>34</sup> and how to include measurable program objectives, implementation strategies, and resource requirements.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the calls for clear strategy relate to topics discussed earlier under the category of leadership.<sup>36</sup> According to one commentator, without a clear strategy, “the leaders of each department, agency and office are left to decide what is important.”<sup>37</sup> Most of the sources recommending clear strategy call for highest-level strategy, as well as strategy that goes beyond strategic communication: a clear foreign policy strategy that strategic communication can support. Several specific recommendations for elements of such a strategy are presented in the section “Recommended Strategy Elements and Resource Targets.”

### **Coordinate Better and Organize Differently**

Second in prevalence to increased resources for strategic communication is an admonition to coordinate better, with 19 of the reviewed documents and more than half of interview respondents making such a recommendation. Many sources lament the lack of coordination of U.S. government strategic communication efforts, both within and between agencies. Most subsequently recommend increased efforts to coordinate or new ways to organize (or support) efforts. Some organizational change is recommended in almost every document reviewed; the exceptions are those that focus on a narrower set of issues. Consensus is less strong, however, on the specific organizational changes needed. These include

<sup>30</sup> Carlson, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Public Diplomacy Council, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Susan B. Epstein, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and the 9/11 Commission Recommendations*, Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., May 1, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges*, Washington, D.C., GAO-06-535, May 2006.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, Washington, D.C., GAO-03-951, September 2003b.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *U.S. International Broadcasting: New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audiences but Lacks Measurable Program Objectives*, Washington, D.C., GAO-03-772, July 2003a.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Borg, 2007, p. 23.

- creation of a new government agency
- creation of a new independent supporting organization
- reorganization within existing organizations
- rebalancing authorities between government agencies
- creation of new advisory or coordinating positions.

Several interview respondents expressed considerable frustration with the lack of success of coordination efforts to date. This frustration appears in many of the documents included in this analysis and in the broader community of interest. For example, Jeffrey Jones, former director for strategic communication and information on the NSC, laments, “There is little evidence of cooperation, coordination, or even appreciation for the impact of strategic communication.”<sup>38</sup> One interview respondent advocated for real authority in coordination: “You’ve got to have teeth. If it is just a coordination committee . . . *coordination* is a pernicious word.”<sup>39</sup>

Another interview respondent indicated concerns about further organizational changes within the U.S. government. He argued that what we have “may not be perfect, but it is workable” and that radical changes could set public diplomacy and strategic communication back years if the existing network of coordinators and practitioners is disrupted.<sup>40</sup> This minority view of concern about fragmentation and disruption during reorganization is explicitly echoed, along with other objections, by the dissenting opinion of the 2005 report of the Public Diplomacy Council.<sup>41</sup>

### A New Government Agency

Only four of the documents reviewed recommend the creation of a new government agency (or, in one case, the reestablishment of a former agency). These proposals met nothing but criticism from interview respondents. Such recommendations include the creation of the U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy (USAPD),<sup>42</sup> the National Center for Strategic Communication (would pull public diplomacy and USIA remnants out of DOS and disestablish BBG, assuming internal broadcasting functions as well),<sup>43</sup> and the reestablishment of USIA.<sup>44</sup> Members of the Public Diplomacy Council wrote a dissent to that body’s recommendation for the USAPD, asserting that the report “draws too heavily on the past and assumes that a restoration of an organization resembling USIA within the State Department, conduct-

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey B. Jones, “Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 39, 4th Quarter 2005, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory, interview, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> James K. Glassman, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., October 24, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Fulton et al., undated.

<sup>42</sup> Public Diplomacy Council, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Senate, Strategic Communications Act of 2008, A Bill to Establish the National Center for Strategic Communication to Advise the President Regarding Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting to Promote Democracy and Human Rights, and for Other Purposes, S.3546, 110th Congress, 2nd session, September 17, 2008, also known as the Brownback Bill.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Michael J. Zwiebel, “Why We Need to Reestablish the USIA,” *Military Review*, November–December 2006.



ing the same programs but enjoying greater resources, will regain United States prestige and leadership on the global stage.”<sup>45</sup>

While the disestablishment of USIA in 1999 is widely viewed as unfortunate,<sup>46</sup> commentators also identified several significant barriers to its reestablishment. First, it would take some time: The United States needs to improve strategic communication *now*, and standing up a whole new agency would be too time-consuming. Second, and compounding the first, is that the new agency would, by necessity, strip personnel from existing organizations and dismantle the existing network,<sup>47</sup> thus resulting in a step backward and lost time before the next step forward is taken. Third, it is not clear that the new USIA would be a complete solution: It could solve some but not all of the problems identified with regard to current strategic communication and public diplomacy.<sup>48</sup>

### A New Supporting Organization

Ten of the documents reviewed recommend an independent or semi-independent organization for the conduct or support of strategic communication or public diplomacy. Most interview respondents were supportive of one or more of these proposals (in part, no doubt, because several respondents were coauthors of one of these reports). Among the recommended organizations are the nonprofit, nongovernmental “institution for international knowledge and communication” recommended by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Commission on Smart Power;<sup>49</sup> the “Center for Global Engagement” proposed by the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication;<sup>50</sup> and the “USA/World Trust” proposed by Kristin Lord of the Brookings Institution.<sup>51</sup>

The organization proposed by CSIS

would seek to fill gaps where they exist in four main operational areas: (1) improved understanding (through polling and research); (2) dialogue of ideas (through mutual exchanges); (3) advice to public officials (through expert analysis); and (4) shaping foreign attitudes about the United States to fit with reality (through communications strategies).<sup>52</sup>

It would also have an independent board and make recommendations for government action.

<sup>45</sup> Fulton et al., undated.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Stephen Johnson, Helle C. Dale, and Patrick Cronin, “Strengthening U.S. Public Diplomacy Requires Organization, Coordination, and Strategy,” Heritage Foundation, Background No. 1875, August 5, 2005, and Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Glassman, interview, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous author interview.

<sup>49</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, Commission on Smart Power, *A Smarter, More Secure America*, Washington, D.C., November 2007, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> Defense Science Board, 2008; see also Leigh Warner, “Center for Global Engagement: A Proposal for the Creation of a Congressionally-Funded Entity,” white paper, January 2008, and Tom Korologos and Bruce Sherman, “Developing a Center for Global Engagement at RAND,” unpublished concept paper, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Lord, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007, p. 68.

The Defense Science Board's Center for Global Engagement would

- be independent and outside of government—free of the constraints of government and able to advise government as an objective outsider
- be a hub for coordination and collaboration between government agencies and between government, the private sector, and civil society
- conduct research (specifically, market research, market segmentation, and surveys of attitudes and behaviors) and house or serve as a repository for existing research
- conduct ongoing and future-oriented research and assessment (as distinct from market research)
- serve as a repository for expertise, including the “best and brightest,” as well as individuals with country skills (e.g., language skills, relevant cultural, regional, historical knowledge) and expert communicators who are available on demand
- promote innovation in cultural understanding and communication technology
- spearhead creative program development, including experimentation and implementation of pilot communication efforts, and have (or have access to) a cadre of expert communicators capable of creatively helping to transform policy goals into effective themes and contextually specific messages or programs.<sup>53</sup>

The USA/World Trust organization proposed in the Brookings report would engage in five activities:<sup>54</sup>

- It would conduct research and analysis, drawing on the knowledge of experts, and would convey the results in a form useful to public diplomacy practitioners.
- It would tap into the vast potential of the private sector and engage companies, non-governmental organizations, universities, and others to work on innovative new initiatives.
- It would provide grants and venture capital to endeavors that advance its objectives.
- It would identify, cultivate, and experiment with new technologies and media products that support U.S. public diplomacy and strategic communication.
- It would bring together practitioners from the U.S. government with scholars and talented visitors from the private and nonprofit sectors to address public diplomacy and strategic communication challenges.

All three proposals have common threads, including independence, access to expertise outside of government, a focus on research, the ability to experiment, and an emphasis on providing support and advice to the government. Sources (including interview respondents) advocating one of these organizations all emphasize the importance of independence. Such independence is considered critical for the some or all of the following reasons:

- to allow the free exchange of ideas between the government and the private sector
- to allow the organization to serve as an honest broker and provide a neutral forum

<sup>53</sup> Defense Science Board, 2008; see also Warner, 2008, and Korologos and Sherman, 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Lord, 2008.



- to permit the organization to be free to take risks or experiment without directly embarrassing the U.S. government
- to enable the organization to be forward-leaning and look past immediate day-to-day crisis communication needs
- to retain agility and avoid unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles
- to permit the pooling of funds from multiple sources and avoid government restrictions on moving and using money, hiring, and so on.

The reviewed reports also propose additional organizational detail (e.g., recommended funding, type of organization, oversight arrangements).

### **Reorganize Existing Machinery**

In the service of coordination or more effective organization, fully 21 documents recommend some kind of reorganization of existing government agencies. This includes reorganization within DOS (10 endorsements), DoD (six endorsements), and the White House (nine endorsements). Also proposed is the rebalancing of authority between agencies (five endorsements) and the addition of new advisers or coordinators in the executive branch, usually (if specified) at the NSC or OMB (14 endorsements). The addition of new executive advisers or coordinators is the most frequently recommended organizational change in the documents and was also suggested by approximately one-third of the interview respondents. These proposals have one or more declared aims: to improve coordination,<sup>55</sup> increase integration of and organizational regard for those who participate in strategic communication or public diplomacy,<sup>56</sup> increase the authority of those who are in charge of strategic communication or public diplomacy,<sup>57</sup> and place strategic communication or public diplomacy assets and resources where they ought to be organizationally.<sup>58</sup>

### **Recommended Strategy Elements and Resource Targets**

While the four themes capture the kernel of the most prevalent contemporary recommendations for strategic communication, reviewed advocacy documents contain numerous recommendations for specific elements of new strategy, detail regarding the allocation of new resources, and general advice. Several of these appear frequently enough, are articulated persuasively enough, or are interesting enough to merit inclusion here. The frequency of appearance of these specific recommendations is also noted.

<sup>55</sup> See Defense Science Board, 2008; Borg, 2007; and Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Lord, 2008; U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *Getting the People Part Right: A Report on the Human Resources Dimension of U.S. Public Diplomacy*, Washington, D.C., 2008.

<sup>57</sup> See Defense Science Board, 2008 and 2004, and Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> American Academy of Diplomacy and Stimson Center, 2008; Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007; Public Diplomacy Council, 2005; U.S. Senate, 2008.

### Revise the Smith-Mundt Act

The U.S. Information and Education Exchange Act of 1948 (the Smith-Mundt Act) authorized the U.S. government for the first time in its history to conduct international information and educational exchange activities on a permanent basis. It also carried stipulations preventing the government from disseminating public diplomacy materials domestically. Observers note that, while a prohibition on propagandizing the U.S. population remains a good idea in principle, the specific prohibitions enacted (or interpreted to have been enacted) in this 1948 legislation fail to take into account the global nature of the contemporary information environment. As one analyst has argued,

The Act's primary effect today is to restrict, if artificially, much of the government, often beyond the State Department, from conducting effective message campaigns in a global media environment. It has also been widely over-applied to effectively silence much of the government's potential for responding and neutralizing enemy propaganda, arguably leaving the government with the ability only to make a request that U.S. news networks not broadcast foreign propaganda.<sup>59</sup>

Smith-Mundt has been used as an excuse to prevent DoD from putting certain kinds of information on the Internet (for fear that it might be viewed by the domestic audience)<sup>60</sup> and has prevented DOS from disseminating foreign public opinion research to other agencies. Six documents recommend the revision of Smith-Mundt to repeal certain outdated restrictions; slightly fewer than one-third of interview respondents also made this recommendation.<sup>61</sup>

### Better Leverage the Private Sector

Thirteen of the documents reviewed and more than half of interview respondents advise adoption of strategies that better leverage the private sector. The proposals for a new supporting organization are an example of this. Central to this recommendation is the recognition that (1) the government cannot do it all, and (2) the government lacks the expertise to do all that it wants to. Public-private partnerships, exchanges of ideas with academe and industry, and the mobilization of various organizational actors in civil society were all recommended, with Sesame Workshop, One Laptop per Child, and similar nongovernmental organizations receiving specific mention.

### Adopt Enterprise-Level or Whole-of-Government Solutions

Many of the pleas for leadership stem from the importance of involving the whole of government in strategic communication. According to the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, this is only possible in the presence of "a firm commitment and directive from the President to all relevant government agencies that emphasizes the importance of public diplomacy in advancing American interests."<sup>62</sup> Coordination is also deemed

<sup>59</sup> Matthew C. Armstrong, "Operationalizing Public Diplomacy," in Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> See Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Matt Armstrong, "Persuasive Politics," *Washington Times*, December 19, 2008, and Johnson, Dale, and Cronin, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, 2003, p. 17.

as critical because of risks of information fratricide or working at cross-purposes. Implicit in many of the calls for coordinating authority at the NSC level is an imputation of strategic communication value to efforts coordinated across agencies.

Nine of the documents reviewed and roughly one-third of interview respondents call for whole-of-government or enterprise-level commitments to strategic communication. As Lt Col Lindsey Borg states, “[S]trategic communication development efforts must be on the enterprise level: every public information resource must be developed with a consideration of its strategic communication role.”<sup>63</sup> If one embraces a broad conception of strategic communication to encompass all messages (including the message content of actions), then the pinnacle of strategic communication success will require its embrace at the enterprise level.

### **Better Use of Research**

Six of the reviewed documents explicitly recommend better resourcing for and better use of research. This was a popular theme among interview respondents, with slightly less than half endorsing this recommendation. Such research includes public opinion data and other “market” research, as well as relevant academic research and policy research and analysis. Currently, this area is considered desperately underresourced. One respondent observed, “It is pathetic, frankly, what we have here in terms of research capabilities,” adding that those currently responsible for overseeing this research continue to perform at a high level despite the minimal resources available.<sup>64</sup> Proponents assert that existing research could and should be shared between and within agencies more effectively.<sup>65</sup>

Advocates note that one of the goals of involving the private sector and creating a supporting organization outside of government is to provide better access to just such research. Various reports indicate that, in addition to generating or accessing the research, internal procedures will need to be changed to take advantage of this resource.

### **Greater Focus on Measurement**

Similar to advocacy for research is advocacy for practices emphasizing measurement. Six of the reports reviewed (including two separate GAO reports) make recommendations in this area. The U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication notes, “Evaluation should measure progress toward the achievement of goals, allowing managers to adjust methods and means, and make informed decisions about resources.”<sup>66</sup> Two GAO reports find that establishing measurable program objectives facilitates planning and is a best practice observed in industry.<sup>67</sup> Details of these recommendations include the establishment of a culture of measurement, development of core performance indicators, and increased data collection efforts.

<sup>63</sup> Borg, 2007, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Glassman, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Actions Needed to Improve Strategic Use and Coordination of Research*, Washington, D.C., GAO-07-904, July 2007; also echoed by Sherman, interview, 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, 2007, p. 33.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003a, 2003b.

### **Increase Technology Use and Experiment with New Technologies**

Ten of the documents reviewed and roughly one-third of interview respondents recommend that U.S. strategic communication and public diplomacy must adjust to the contemporary information environment and incorporate or expand the use of new technology. These recommendations range from general admonitions to “exploit [the United States’] technological edge”<sup>68</sup> and be better prepared to exploit new media to more specific instructions, such as increased use of network analysis and machine translation.<sup>69</sup> More than one interview respondent indicated a need for a technological solution and sharing strategic communication information and research within the government.

### **Update or Revise Doctrine or Training and Increase Training and Education**

On a related note, seven sources advocate better preparation for strategic communication and public diplomacy personnel, either through revised doctrine and training curricula or increased training opportunities. Training for public diplomacy, training for new technology, and updated instruction manuals and doctrine can lead to better prepared practitioners. Advocates note that revising and providing such training is not free but needs to be resourced.

### **Increase Exchanges, Libraries, International Education Programs, and Other Resources**

In discussing the allocation of new resources, 11 documents recommend the expansion of traditional public diplomacy activities, including exchange programs, international libraries, international education programs, and other international outreach efforts. Such activities, proponents argue, are relatively inexpensive and contribute valuable foundation in opening the door for engaging in subsequent dialogue, creating relationships, and encouraging awareness of shared values between the United States and others.

### **Establish a Quadrennial Review of Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy**

Two reports recommend the establishment of a quadrennial review for strategic communication and public diplomacy.<sup>70</sup> They assert that such a review would provide a useful opportunity for strategic course correction and monitoring of the implementation of intended organizational (and other) changes.

### **Review International Broadcasting**

Three of the documents advocate a review of current international broadcasting activities through the BBG. One proposes the dissolution of the BBG and the incorporation of international broadcasting into a new USIA-like National Center for Strategic Communication.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Fulton et al., undated.

<sup>69</sup> Defense Science Board, 2008.

<sup>70</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007; Council on Foreign Relations, 2003.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Senate, 2008.

## Conclusions

According to published work and the interviews conducted as part of this effort, strategic communication reform has been plagued by misses and false starts and remains an urgent matter. The core themes distilled here from various sources retain their resonance.

Many observers and analysts assert that strategic communication needs leadership, including authority to compel coordination, high-level commitment to strategic communication at the enterprise level, and decisionmaking that considers the impact of international public opinion on policy and vice versa. The most frequently appearing recommendation in the documents reviewed and the supporting interviews is to increase resources for strategic communication. Interview respondents noted that, in a budget-constrained environment, perhaps this means a shift of resources from other DOS activities to public diplomacy, or from DoD to DOS. Other popular refrains include leadership, priority, and a commitment to communication-mindedness as the cornerstones of an effective communication strategy. Indeed, many experts assert that a clear articulation of national foreign policy strategy and the role that communication plays in that strategy is essential. The vast majority of the documents reviewed indicate that effective coordination of strategic communication would require further organizational change. There is disagreement among the various sources about exactly what changes are required. These may include realignment at DOS, reorganization at DoD, a coordinating authority at the NSC level, or all of the above; a new authority at the NSC level was prescribed with the greatest frequency. Ten documents and as many interviews suggest a new, independent organization for the analytical support of strategic communication. Such an organization, they argue, could facilitate many recommended goods for the community, including the involvement of the private sector, better research, and better use of new technology.

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## Protocol for Semistructured Interviews

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### *Interview and Questions for Inventory and Evaluation of Efforts Proposed and Under Way for the Interagency Integration of Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy*

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a researcher at RAND. RAND is a private, nonprofit, public policy research organization with a long-standing research relationship with the Department of Defense (DoD). As part of an internally funded research effort in our National Security Research Division, we seek first to inventory the various proposals and ideas established and circulating for the reform and improvement of strategic communication and public diplomacy. Second, we are trying to catalog the current status of efforts along these lines throughout the federal government. This semistructured interview is one of our avenues of data collection.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Please feel free to tell us you don't know or don't wish to answer a question, or don't want to complete the interview. We make every effort to credit material to the individual from whom it comes. However, preservation of anonymity is in no way a problem should you prefer it. Do you have any reservations regarding our citing you in connection with your remarks?

Before we begin, it would be helpful for us to know a little bit about your background and your current role.

Q1. What is your current position and how long have you been with this organization?

Q2. What is your history of involvement in issues related to or having awareness of strategic communication?

We're interested both in ideas and proposals and in efforts under way (or about to begin) to implement those ideas and proposals. We're also interested in studies that might yield new suggestions. Basically, we want to inventory available ideas, catalog efforts in pursuit of those ideas, and anticipate where additional ideas or movement are likely.

Q3. What proposals or suggestions for the organization, reorganization, or improvement of strategic communication are out there?

- Probe. In/from your agency?
- Probe. Other agencies?
- Probe. Formal reports, circulating briefings, white papers, memos, napkins?

Follow-up. Where can I get a copy of that/whom should I contact about that?

Follow-up. What kind of support (funding, analytical support, executive focus) would that proposal require in order to be successful?

Q4. What activities are you aware of trying to realize or follow any of these proposals or suggestions?

- Probe. In/by your agency?
- Probe. Elsewhere in the government?

Q5. What other new efforts, programs, or reforms in strategic communication or related areas are you aware of?

Follow-up. Whom should I contact to learn more about that?

Q6. Are there studies under way, conferences scheduled, working groups or consortia established to try to make progress in this area?

- Probe. Organized/sponsored by whom?
- Probe. With what goals?

Follow-up. Whom should I contact to learn more about that?

Q7. Of the various proposals and efforts you are most familiar with, which hold the most promise? Why?

Q8. Of the various proposals and efforts you are aware of, which are you most skeptical of? Why?

Q9. Whom else should we speak to?

- Probe. Someone who might be aware of an effort you are not?
- Probe. For more details about one of the efforts you are aware of?
- Probe. Do you have a phone number or email address for that person/someone in that office?

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us. If there is something you think of subsequently that you would like to share, please contact the principal investigator at Christopher\_Paul@rand.org or at 412-683-2300 x4609. If there is something we can help you with in the future, don't hesitate to get in touch.

If I have your contact information, I will add you to the distribution list for whatever reports or articles are produced by this project (unless you would prefer I did not).

Q10. Do we have your full contact information?

- Probe. Phone?
- Probe. Email?
- Probe. Mailing address?